

Mom Finally Finds Son-

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-on N.O. Death Row

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LARRY JOE
"RAT" PURKEY

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By JACK DEMPSEY

An Indiana mother who gave up her son in infancy spoke with him for the first time today in a tearful telephone reunion, the son talking from a death row cell in Parish Prison.

The mother, Mrs. Arthur G. Sutton of Greenfield, Ind., talked with convicted killer Larry Joe "Rat" Purkey, who faces death in the electric chair for the Mardi Gras, 1968, slaying of Taylor West McLaurin Jr. of Charleston, W. Va.

"I always knew I'd find him someday, or we would run across each other on the street, but I didn't think it would be this way," sobbed Mrs. Sutton.

THE MOTHER said she

plans to leave Indianapolis tonight by car to make the 800-mile trip to see her son for the first time in 21 years.

The reunion came about when Purkey wrote an Indianapolis newspaper for help to "meet my real mother before I die." He gave enough details of his past to lead to Mrs. Sutton, who telephoned him this afternoon.

"All I want to do is find you," she told Purkey, adding that she plans to drive here immediately, leaving her husband to care for Purkey's two half sisters and half brother.

"I HOPE YOU don't hold it against me—I didn't want give you up," she sobbed.

Asked by his mother if he thought he would ever get out of jail, Purkey said:

"I'm positive. If not, I would not have tried to find you."

"If I get out of here, mamma, we'll have plenty of time together."

AND HE HAD a further

surprise for her—he told her he plans to be married presently to a girl he met through one of his fellow prisoners. "All I need is two rings and a license," he said.

After the conversation with his mother, Purkey said he is seeking a new trial on grounds that his confession to the slaying was obtained under duress.

Purkey said that though he was reared a Protestant, he has been praying with the Catholic chaplain at Parish Prison and "now one of my prayers has been answered"—finding his mother.

Now, he said, he has two

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more goals—to get married and to clear his name.

PURKEY SAID he left his foster home because of a dispute with his stepfather, served a jail term for car theft, joined a carnival and then a motorcycle gang in Florida.

Joining the gang, he said, was "the biggest mistake I ever made."

Mrs. Sutton said she was 15 when she put Larry, then 11 months old, up for adoption. "I didn't want to give up my baby but my mother said I was too young."

THE BOY WAS adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth H. Purkey of Seymour, Ind., and they renamed him Larry Joe Purkey.

Under that name, Purkey was sentenced to die for the slaying of McLaurin, 24, whose body was found floating in a City Park lagoon March 8, 1968.

DURING PURKEY'S trial before Criminal District Judge Frank Shea, a confession by Purkey was introduced in which he admitted placing a "German death lock" on the victim, who "went limp."

Purkey said later police beat him with a rubber hose for an hour the night he and James "Bulldog" Cripps, 20, of Mount Pleasant Mich. were arrested. Cripps also faces death in the electric chair for the slaying.

Mrs. Sutton said welfare workers told her she could never get her son back. "They said he was in a good

home and happy. I tried several times."

No execution date has been set for Purkey and Cripps and none will be until their appeals are exhausted.

TWO CHALMETTE youths

rowing in the City Park lagoon found McLaurin's body last year, 10 days after he was slain on Feb. 26. The victim's body later was identified by his father.

Purkey and Cripps were arrested March 13. They told

police they were members of the "Flying Axmen" motorcycle gang, in New Orleans for Carnival to steal cycles.

Police said they had been suspicious of Purkey since March 7, when he was arrested with six others at 941

Dumaine, where a youth was found dead amid hippie paraphernalia and a quantity of narcotics.

Purkey and Cripps were found guilty Nov. 14 and sentenced to death by Judge Shea Dec. 11.